

From- O.C. Royal Canadian Dragoons  
To- Adjutant General Ottawa  
On Board Transport "Roslin Castle"

2nd January, 1901.

Sir.

In accordance with instructions received from Head Quarters, Canada, through the Staff Officer, Canadians at Cape Town. South Africa. I have the honour to submit my report concerning the regiment under my command, while employed on active service in South Africa.

#### Organization

When the regiment arrived at Cape Town, South Africa, it was styled the 1st Battalion Canadian Mounted Rifles, and has been raised from the Royal Canadian Dragoons as a Special Service Regiment, for duty in South Africa.

It was therefore placed at a disadvantage to the Canadian permanent Artillery and Infantry, both of whom retained their distinctive Royal titles.

It was felt by all that the changing of the name of the Corps, from that conferred by the Queen to that of 1<sup>st</sup> Battn. Canadian Mounted Rifles precluded the regiment from wearing in the field the distinctive badge given them by Her Majesty and from attaching to the regiment the honours it would strive to earn in this campaign.

The regiment desired to be allowed to feel that they serving as members of a Corps which, Her Majesty had specially honoured but which had for the first time, an opportunity of showing its devotion to Her Person and Empire, I therefore applied that the Royal title be given back to the regiment, which I am pleased to say was granted by the authorities.

#### Establishment

The regiment was divided into two service Squadrons of one hundred and sixty Officers, Non-Commissioned Officers and Men.

The division of the regiment into two Squadrons, did not work satisfactorily for the following reasons, viz:-

1st. The Squadron establishment of 160 of all ranks was taken from the war establishment of an English Cavalry regiment, but it must be remembered that an English regiment works in double rank formation. Our regiment worked in a single rank, the men not being sufficiently trained to do so in double rank:, besides the single rank system is admitted to be the simpler, and more advantages, for reasons too numerous for me to mention here.

2nd. The system of having only two Squadrons in a regiment is not a good one, because the moment one of the Squadrons is ordered away, the Officer Commanding the regiment is left without a command. I mean, he cannot very well take command of the remaining Squadron over his Squadron Commander.

When the regiment is composed of three Squadrons there is less likelihood of the above occurring, in fact it never occurs.

There is no doubt but that the same regiment, with the same strength, might be divided into three Squadrons of one hundred (all ranks) each. This would have proved more satisfactory.

### Promotion.

There was no provision made for the promotion of Officers. For instance if an Officer had become non-effective through death or otherwise, I could not promote a junior in his place because the Imperial authorities would have nothing to do with the case.

I forwarded an application to the Imperial authorities for the promotion of an Officer, and my application was returned to me, with the remarks, "the Canadian authorities should be applied to in these matters", and often there were times, when I could not communicate with the outside world at all. Hence for months no promotions took place.

### Standard Height.

The standard height of the regiment is laid down to be 5 feet 6 inches. There were men in the regiment who were 6 feet and 6 feet 2 inches in height, and a large proportion 5 feet 9 inches to 5 feet 10 inches. It can easily be imagined what a source of trouble these heavy men were to the Officers, and especially to themselves, when our Canadian horses were no longer available.

We were classed as Mounted Infantry, and the authorities considered that an Argentine pony was good enough for Mounted Infantry. I pleaded hard with General Hutton, and he himself I believe did his best to obtain a better horse for us, but to avail. The answer was in every instance, that all Cavalry horses were reserved for the Cavalry, I have had as many as 50 dismounted men, or leading played out Argentines. It was most disheartening at times.

### Saddlery

The Universal Saddle issued to the regiment was not a success, for the following reasons, viz:-

- 1st It is too heavy, the saddle itself weighs 28 lbs. while the American Saddle weighs only 14 lbs. A saddle weighing about 18 or 20 lbs. would answer best.
- 2nd The stuffed panels are preferable to blankets. There were three saddles in use during the campaign:
  - (a) The Universal pattern Saddle
  - (b) The American pattern
  - (c) The Colonial

The last-named saddle with its stuffed panels, proved itself the most satisfactory. A man having to rise at 3 A.M. daily for several months, is not as careful as he should be, in the manner in which he folds his saddle blanket, the consequence is his horse gets a sore back. On active service no matter how keen the Officers are, in matters of interior economy, they cannot inspect every saddle before marching off, besides the saddling is done in the dark, and very often the regiment itself marches off in the dark.

- 3rd The blanket gets dirty, sweaty, and wet.

### Horses

The Canadian horses were good ones, and did very well considering all the hardships they had to undergo, and the heavy weights they had to carry, A few of them were still in the regiment on its leaving the front.

Disposition of Canadian Horses

Died at sea in transit from Canada to South Africa	40
Died of exhaustion, killed in action, or destroyed	194
Rendered unfit for duty, and left behind at different stations	123
Sold to the Imperial authorities	
Handed over to O.C. 5th Lancers	7
Handed over to Remount depot Pretoria	<u>11</u>
Total	375
Establishment	375

Marching and Engagements.

The regiment was extremely fortunate, in that, on arrival at Cape Town, it was despatched almost immediately to the front.

The regiment has marched 1700 miles, and has taken part in the following engagements: -

April 22, 23, 24,	Leeuw Kop (Waterworks)	3 days fighting
May 3	Brantfort	1 days fighting
May 4	Constantia	1 days fighting
May 5	Vet River	1 days fighting
May 7	Virginia Siding	1 days fighting
May 10	Verdris Verdrag	1 days fighting
May 25	Viljoens Drift	1 days fighting
May 27, 28	Klip Riverburg	2 days fighting
May 30	Near Driefontein	1 days fighting
June 3	Kalkheuvel	1 days fighting
June 11, 12	Diamond Hills	2 days fighting
June 18, 19	Zoutspans Drift	1 days fighting
July 6	Rietfontein	1 days fighting
July 7	Oliphantsfontein	1 days fighting
July 8, 9, 10	Rietfontein	3 days fighting
July 12	Witpoort-Koffyspruit	1 days fighting
July 16	Witpoort-Dorstfontein	1 days fighting
July 23	Boschfontein	1 days fighting
July 27	Baakfontein	1 days fighting
August 1	Buffelspruit	1 days fighting
August 3	Dornkop	1 days fighting
August 25, 26, 27	Belfast-Bergandale	3 days fighting
October 1	Boschpoort	1 days fighting
October 5	Weltfreden	1 days fighting
November 2	Witkloof	1 days fighting
November 6, 7	Van Wyks Vlei-Liliefontein	2 days fighting
November 13-17	Witpoort-Dulstroom	5 days fighting

### Clothing

The clothing issued to the men, supposed to be khaki, was only an imitation. In washing it shrank and turned white.

The Pantaloons should have been of cloth or tweed material and not of khaki.

### Machine Guns

Two machine guns were attached to the regiment, viz:- One Colt Gun, and one Maxim. The Colt gun proved to be the better of the two for the following reasons:-

#### Disadvantages of the Maxim in Comparison with the Colt gun.

1. Being too heavy and cumbersome, and it requires at least four horses to drag it.
2. On account of its weight, it cannot be brought up into action as quickly and as close as the Colt.
3. It often clogs.
4. The water Jacket requires to be filled continually with water to keep the barrel cool.

#### Advantages of the Colt Gun in comparison with the Maxim Gun.

1. It is light and only requires one horse to drag it.
2. It can be brought into action quickly, and quite close to the enemy.
3. It never clogs.
4. It does not require a water jacket, having a gas check.
5. If caught by the enemy at close quarters, the gun can be detached from the carriage quite easily and carried away on the saddle. This was done at least on two occasions in the regiment during the campaign.

#### Disadvantages of the Colt Gun.

1. The Dundonald carriage and wheels are not strong enough. This could easily be remedied by a stronger carriage and wheels.

### Transport

The Transport Waggon were good ones and made of good material.

They stood the hard work splendidly, and are far superior to the Imperial waggons.

I should like to recommend that sideboards be placed on the sides of the waggons to facilitate loading, at the same time these sideboards would admit of taking larger loads.

In my opinion mules are more adaptable for Transport work than horses.

### Arms

The regiment was armed with the long rifle and although I am fully prepared to recognize that all mounted troops should have been armed with a long rifle in the late campaign, yet I must report against the Lee-Enfield as being far too heavy for a man to carry during a long hot days work. The men complained to me about it, and often asked to be allowed to carry the rifle in the bucket, which was against the orders which General Hutton had given. The General believed that when the rifle is carried in the bucket, the man is apt to lean against it, and this giving an uneven bearing to the saddle on the horses back, causes sore backs, etc:.

I do not believe that because Cavalry and in fact all mounted troops should have been armed with a long rifle in the late campaign, that it will be the same in future campaigns.

Before making a statement of this kind I should prefer to wait for the decision of the English authorities on the subject.

At the same time I am fully prepared to strongly recommend that a better arm than the Carbine be given to our Canadian Mounted troops. Could we not have a rifle shorter and lighter than the Lee-Enfield which would answer the same purpose and yet not be a burden to the man?.

### Revolvers

The regiment was also issued with revolvers, but as soon as the Corps landed in South Africa I ordered the revolvers to be turned into stores.

I had already been three months at the front attached to the Cavalry Division, and knew perfectly well that the revolvers would be no use, and would only be an additional weight to the already overburdened man and horse.

I may now report that at no time during the campaign could the regiment have used the revolvers.

### Drafts

I am sure if Canada ever sends Cavalry on active service again, drafts of officers, non-comm: officers and men should be got ready at home to despatch to the front to replace casualties.

The undermentioned state is a copy of a skeleton state of the regiment rendered on the 12th November 1900.

Officers	Other Ranks
3	83

These figures include myself.

### General State on debarkation at Halifax

On Parade	209
On command (in South Africa and proceeding via England	26
Discharged and transferred in South Africa	45
Invalided from South Africa (Sick and wounded)	80
Casualties (Killed and died from disease)	20
Missing	<u>1</u>
Total all ranks	381
Establishment	371
Transferred from corps and enrolled in South Africa	<u>10</u>
Total all ranks	381

Non-Com Officers and Men discharged in South Africa, were discharged for the purpose of joining the Constabulary, Major Howards Colt Gun Battery and Corps of Scouts, & the Imperial Military Railway.

### General Remarks

In conclusion I wish to congratulate all the Officers, Non-Comm: Officers and Men of the regiment under my command for the excellent work they have performed, and to thank them for the assistance they have given me throughout the campaign.

There are several Officers, Non-Comm: Officers and Men whom I happen to know have been brought, to the notice of the Commander-in-Chief, and I should also like to mention their names here.

Major W. Forester	Commanding "A" Squadn:
Major V.A.S. Williams	Commanding "B" Squadn:
Capt. C.M. Nelles	Adjutant
Lieut. H.L. Borden	"B" Squadn:
Lieut. R.E.W. Turner	"B" Squadn:
Lieut. H.Z.C. Cockburn	"A" Squadn:
Lieut. J.H. Elmsley	"A" Squadn:
Lieut. F.V. Young	"B" Squadn:
Lieut. J.E. Burch	S.S. Officer (Attached)
Lieut. A.L. Howard	In charge of Machine Guns
No. 410 Sergt: R.H. Ryan	
No. 151 Sergt: E.L. Purden	
No. 176 Sergt: E.J. Holland	
No. 105 Sergt: N.D. Builder	
No. 185 Private W.A. Knisley	

In addition to the above I wish to mention and bring before the notice of the General Officer Commanding the Canadian Militia the following Officer:-

Surgeon Major H.R. Duff, for zeal and assiduousness to his work as well as personal bravery while attending to the wounded in the field.

No words of praise from me can adequately express to you as I would wish, the untiring zeal and the determination of purpose to surmount obstacles displayed by all, and the very evident intention of all ranks, from the moment we took the field, to meet the hardships and privations, of this, the most severe campaign in modern history, without a murmur.

### Records

I attach hereto the General State of the regiment under my com mand, on debarkation at Halifax, also true copies of the records.

### Medals-Claims for

Claims for Medals have been rendered. As Bars for this campaign have not yet been decided on, the claims for same can be rendered at a later date.

I have the honour to be  
Sir  
Your obedient Servant  
F.L Lessard  
Lieut.-Col.  
Commanding Royal Canadian Dragoons

Appendix (1)

The following copies of letters received by me from time to time are forwarded for the information of the Major General Commanding.

(1)

From:- O.C. 2nd Battn. Royal Irish Fusiliers.

To ; O.C. Royal Canadian Dragoons.

Rietvlei 17th July, 1900.

Dear Colonel Lessard.

In the few words I spoke to-night at the funeral of your two very gallant Officers. I am afraid I failed to convey the deep gratitude my regiment owes to the Royal Canadian Dragoons, for their great gallantry in going so nobly and fearlessly to the succour of our beleaguered detachment at Witpoort yesterday.

The counter attack your regiment made occurred at a most critical moment and it doubtless saved many of the lives of our detachment.

We deplore greatly the losses you have sustained and we shall ever bear in grateful memory the gallantry and self sacrifice of the Royal Canadian Dragoons on this occasion.

I shall deem it a great favour if you will kindly convey to your Officers, Non-Comm: Officers and Men the purport of this letter.

Yours very faithfully.

(signed) John Reeves, Colonel.

Commndg. 2nd Battn: Princess Victoria's (Royal Irish Fusiliers)

(2)

From Major General E.T.H. Hutton

To Lieut: Colonel Lessard.

Cape Town, S.A.

14th Octbr. 1900

My dear Lessard.

I am for England on the 17th, and although I shall hope to see you, your officers, and your men in London before the end of the year. I cannot sail without sending you a few words of congratulation upon all the success which has attended your regiment while under my command in the late campaign.

It must be with real feelings of satisfaction that your Officers and yourself look back upon the result of the last seven months, and Canada has good reason to be proud of the manner in which your regiment has upheld the reputation of Canadian Troops.

It has been the lot of your regiment, composed as it is of representative detachments from nearly all the cavalry regiments in the Canadian Militia, to illustrate what the type of Colonial Mounted Rifles can accomplish in conjunction with Imperial Mounted Infantry, and when acting with regular Cavalry.

Nothing can be more certain than the impossibility of raising Militia Cavalry to the standard of regular Cavalry, but has been demonstrated and clearly proved that organized as Mounted Rifles, our Colonies can put into the field, a force of men of the utmost value.

I devoutly hope that this fact will be brought home not only to every man in the Dominion Militia Cavalry, but also to the Canadian people, and the Canadian Public opinion.

You have had the inestimable advantage of serving under Colonel Alderson, and of learning what Mounted Troops when handled with judgement, skill and dash can do. It has been a constant pleasure to me to note how excellently your regiment has profited by its opportunities, and what real good service it has performed.

The loss in killed and wounded has been abnormally small considering the number of actions in which your regiment has been engaged, this fact under the circumstances is a guarantee in itself that the Officers have done well, and the men their part as fighting men,

I shall be glad if you will convey to your Officers and Men my sincerest congratulations upon their success throughout the Campaign and my hope for their happy return to their homes.

Wishing you Godspeed.

Believe Me

Yours Sincerely

(Signed) E.T.H. Hutton. Major General.

(3)

List of Special Mention. Recommended by General Smith-Dorrien 6th and 7th November 1900

Lieut.-Col. F.L. Lessard, Comdg. R.C. Dragoons.	For the ability with which he commanded the Rear Guard, on the 7th. Had he not shown great personal bravery in addition to skill I am doubtful if he would have been able to have covered the retreat of the Section of guns on rear guard.
Lieut. R.E.W. Turner. Comdg: Troop.	Although wounded twice he gallantly remained in action in charge of his troop covering the retirement of the guns.
Lieut: H.Z.C. Cockburn. Comdg: Troop.	He covered the retirement of the guns, remained with his troop until it was too late for, him and his men to escape, and were made prisoners. By this act of gallantry the guns were saved.
No. 176 Sergt. E.J. Holland. Comdg. COLT GUN.	He covered the retirement of the guns to the last, then seeing he had not time to limber up, he detached the gun from the carriage, mounted his horse and carried it into safety.
No. 185 Private W.A. Knisley.	Recommended separately.



(4)

Special Orders by Major General H.L. Smith-Dorrien D.S.O.

Commdg. Pan to Dalmanutha.

Head Quarters Belfast 20th Novbr. 1900

Major General Smith-Dorrien cannot allow the Royal Canadian Dragoons and the left Section "D" Battery, Royal Canadian Artillery and the Canadian Mounted Rifles to leave his command en-route for Canada without thanking them for the grand work they have performed for him in the Belfast Flying Column.

In 8 of the last 19 days they have been engaged with the Boers they have proved themselves brave and mobile Mounted Corps, and it has afforded the Major General much pleasure to have been able to send through General the Hon. N. Lyttleton to the Field Marshall Commanding-in-Chief, detailed accounts of their splendid feats of arms, and to have been able to bring to the special notice of the Commander-in-Chief 5 Officers, and 7 Non-comm. Officers and Men for distinguished conduct in the field during these operations.

In wishing them all "good-bye and good luck" - he has no words to express how great a loss they will be to the Flying Column.

He can merely say that he would choose no other mounted troops in the World if he had his choice, and he sincerely hopes the day may come, when he may have them again under his command.

By Order

(Signed) F. Weldon, Captain

C.S.O. Smith-Dorriens Force.

(5)

From:-Br General E.A, Alderson

To:-Lieut: Col: F.L. Lessard.

My Dear Lessard,

I have just come back from the Station where I went to see your people off, but owing to the washing away of a bridge in the storm of last night they did not actually go, but it made me realize how soon they would do so, and I should like to write and tell you how very sincerely sorry I am that they will so soon cease to belong to the M.I. Brigade.

For just 7 months we have soldiered together and each succeeding month my feeling has been "the more I get to know the 1st C.M.R. (I call them by the name I knew them best by) the better I like them.

We, in the regular army, are brought up with cut and dried ideas and red tape, and I should like to say how much I appreciate the ready way in which, those of your people who have not been so brought up, have fallen with my ways.

I have only put in a very brief order in Brigade orders about your going, as I do not think that orders are quite the place to express ones sincere feelings, but I hope you will make what use you like of this letter and that you will let all your people know how very sincerely for myself and for the Brigade I regret their going (though I am glad for their sakes) and also how thoroughly I

appreciate all the excellent work they have done, I have always been proud to speak of them as, and write home of them as "My Canadians."

Yours Very Sincerely.  
(Signed) E.A.H. Alders.m. BR: General.  
Comdg: M.I. Brigade

(6)

Extract from Summary of News of the 8th November 1900,  
published by Major General H.L. Smith-Dorrien. D.S.O.

It was soon evident that the Boers had been largely re-enforced since yesterday and Colonel Lessard with Canadian Dragoons, and two Royal Canadian guns latter under Lieut. Morrison covered the rear and I have no praise too high for the devoted gallantry they all showed in keeping the enemy off Infantry and Convoy.

At 2 P.M. an event unprecedented in this war occurred. Some 200 Boers suddenly charged the rear Guard and guns firing wildly off their horses right up to 70 yards from our dismounted Dragoons. The fact that our total casualties in the day were only 14 shows how wild their fire was. I have several names to bring to C.-in-C.'s notice for devoted gallantry. Some will be recommended for the V.C. The Boers behaved splendidly to the 16 Canadians some of whom were wounded who remained for a few hours in their hands, when they were released these latter report Boer losses very heavy. After Canadians repulsed Boers there, latter worked wider round in very large numbers but our guns did magnificent work often into masses of them and they never again seriously molested us and we camped at Blyvooritzich (12) at 4 P.M. Boers except a few patrols recrossed Komati towards Carolina . They were Carolina Commando under H. Prinsloo reinforced second day from Ermelo.

We fired 563 shells besides Pompoms and a lot of S.A.A in two days. Our casualties second day were 2 killed 12 wounded amongst them 3 Officers Royal Canadian Dragoons wounded.

Dangerously Lieut. Elmsley, severely Lieut. Turner, Slightly Lieut: Cockburn. Am forwarding separately complete list.

We burned 12 farms, captured one prisoner", 14 cattle, 19 horses and 350 sheep and killed a lot of Boers in expedition.

(7)

Morning Orders by Major General H.L. Smith-Dorrien D.S.O.

Commanding Pan to Dalmanutha  
Head Quarters, Belfast 9th November 1900

The Summary of News published with Force Orders of yesterday was a copy of a telegram from the General Officer Commanding sent to the Chief of Staff on the recent two days fighting and following copy of telegram is the reply thereto.

From Lord Roberts. To General Smith-Dorrien. Belfast.

Nov 8th No C 1646. You seem to have had two most successful days with enemy and I congratulate you and all your troops on the admirable manner in which the operations were carried out.

Colonel Lessard with his Canadians had a difficult task in guarding the rear on your return march and deserves great credit as do all who were with him.

By Order  
(Signed) F. Weldon. Capt.  
C.S.O. Smith-Dorrien's Force

S.S. Forces  
Royal Canadian Dragoons  
General State

	All ranks	Nominal Roll Att:
Present on Board transport "Roslin Castle"	209	(a)
On command in South Africa (Sick, on leave, and on duty) 26	26	(b)
Discharged and Transferred in South Africa, for the purpose of joining the Constabulary, I.M.R. and Howards Scouts.	45	(c)
Invalided from South Africa (Sick and wounded)	80	
Casualties. (Killed and Died of Disease)	20	
Missing in South Africa	<u>1</u>	
Total all Ranks	381	
<u>Attached</u>		
Killed in action	1	(e)
Total all Ranks on debarkation in South Africa	371	
Transferred from R.C.R.I	5	(f)
Transferred from Roberts Horse	2	(f)
Enrolled in South Africa	3	
Attached absorbed on vacancy occurring	<u>1</u> (Officer)	
	382	
Establishment	371	

F.L. Lessard  
Lieut.-Colonel  
Commanding Royal Canadian Dragoons